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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: DAS PEKALA AND DEPUTY FM CERAR DISCUSS
EU PRESIDENCY

REF: LJUBLJANA 353

Classified By: CDA Maryruth Coleman for reason 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary. In a May 24 meeting with EUR DAS Mark Pekala, Slovenia's Deputy Foreign Minister Bozo Cerar outlined some goals for the Center for European Perspective (CEP) and described the priorities of the Government of Slovenia (GOS) for its presidency of the European Union in the first half of 12008. Though 18 months away, the GOS has developed its priorities and will kick off its agenda with an international conference on energy called "Caspian Outlook 2008" in August 12006. It will also make enlargement a priority as well as increase attention to EU "neighbors" such as Ukraine, Moldova and Mediterranean countries. Additionally, DAS Pekala raised Slovenia's anti-trafficking efforts and work being done on restitution of Jewish properties seized and nationalized after World War II. End Summary.

12. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Bozo Cerar welcomed the meeting with DAS Mark Pekala and updated him on initiatives Slovenia has launched in the Western Balkans. Slovenia has several institutions through which it works: the Center of Excellence in Finance, the International Trust Fund for Demining, and the recently inaugurated Center for European Perspective. All three institutions are results-oriented. The first two are widely known in the region and beyond and enjoy excellent reputations for professionalism, solid outcomes and have moved from success to success in their relatively short histories. The CEP is expected to join those ranks, and it has already launched and has in development several programs.

Priorities for EU Presidency

13. (C) Cerar listed what he thought would be priorities for Slovenia's EU presidency in the first half of 2008 and said they were not waiting for the presidency to begin to get started on the issues. The constitution and EU institutions topped his list. He worried that the "period of reflection" would go on too long, and Slovenia would want to ensure movement on both fronts during its tenure. Enlargement was next. Cerar expressed the firmly held belief in the GOS that absent the integration of the entire former Yugoslavia into the EU, there "would never be stability in the region." He also expected that Slovenia would maintain focus on the "neighbors" Ukraine, Moldova and the Mediterranean countries.

Slovenia would also like to use its geographical location as a crossroads between east and west Europe, and the many traditions involved, to foster intercultural dialogue. Rounding out the list of top priorities was energy. In August, the GOS plans to inaugurate the Bled Forum with a conference on Energy and the Caspian Basin.

14. (C) Saying it was never too early to start consultations, DAS Pekala suggested this meeting might be considered the first opportunity for an exchange of views on priorities between the US and Slovenia as EU president. The US shares Slovenia's concerns about the need to keep a European perspective alive for the countries of the Western Balkans, to remain committed to partnership in the "neighborhood" and to work as partners on all the common concerns we have in areas outside of Europe. Pekala welcomed the fact that the GOS was making energy a priority and encouraged a sustained focus and open dialogue on this within the EU.

Small but up to Global Responsibilities

15. (C) Looking forward to hosting PDAS Volker and Political Directors from EU-10 foreign ministries in September, Cerar remarked that Slovenia is "small, but it does not run away from responsibilities." While it has an historical interest and responsibility in the Balkans, it does not limit itself to participation in international missions in that region. He underscored Slovenia's significant (for its size) presence in Afghanistan, its trainers both in Iraq and Jordan contributing to those efforts, a "symbolic" presence in Congo and willingness to participate in a NATO mission in Darfur, should that happen. Slovenia will also host a Port Security Initiative (PSI) exercise in May 2007. Cerar said that Slovenia would also like to offer itself (presumably through CEP and other NGOs) as a model for the "nuts and bolts" on how to build a democracy.

Russia

LJUBLJANA 00000359 002 OF 002

16. (C) Mentioning that Prime Minister Janez Jansa was on his way to Moscow to meet with President Putin, Cerar asked for the latest USG views on Russia. DAS Pekala explained that cooperation on globally important, strategic issues such as non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, the Middle East Peace Process, destruction of nuclear weapons, North Korea, etc., was very good. We were, however, concerned about the apparent roll-back of democratic principles within Russia and its reluctance to accept the fact that democracies on Russia's borders are a good thing. And the United States was not shy about expressing these concerns publicly and privately. Cerar took all the comments on board and expressed that Slovenia shared our concerns on democracy issues.

TIP

17. (C) DAS Pekala related the discussion he had had with Chief State Prosecutor Barbara Brezigar just prior to this meeting (Reftel). He emphasized that Slovenia needed to make a strong effort to prosecute and convict traffickers going forward. Cerar reiterated that the GOS was fully committed to combating trafficking, a sclerotic judicial system notwithstanding.

Jewish Restitution

18. (C) Over the past year, the local Jewish community has been in discussions with the GOS about restitution of confiscated and nationalized properties. The GOS has promised to cooperate with members of the Jewish community in researching the properties and using that research as a basis for negotiating appropriate restitution for the surviving family members. It has taken much longer than anticipated

for the GOS to put out a tender for this project, and it is now scheduled for June. DAS Pekala expressed our strong hope that the GOS would give this issue some attention and get the research underway as soon as possible. Bureaucratic problems aside, Pekala said the concern was that this delay was resonating as a step backwards among NGOs and others with an interest in resolving restitution issues in Europe. Cerar said the government was indeed dedicated to solving this problem, and it had set up a commission for just this purpose. He apologized for the bureaucratic delays, but was certain the tender would be advertised in June, the contract awarded by August and the project would be underway by the Fall.

COLEMAN